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TAGS: [PREL](#) [FR](#) [EU](#) [MARR](#) [PGOV](#)

SUBJECT: FRENCH DISAFFECTION WITH THE EU

REF: A. PARIS 5811

[B.](#) PARIS 5837

Classified By: PolMC Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4 (B & D).

[¶](#)1. (SBU) Summary and comment: France's President, Foreign Minister and Minister-Delegate for European Affairs used their late-August remarks to France's conclave of ambassadors, each in his/her own way, to express their continuing concerns about the EU's perceived weaknesses. Chirac complained about the absence of EU action on Lebanon, and Douste-Blazy highlighted France's successful effort to insert the criterion of the EU's absorptive capacity as a way to slow down EU enlargement. Colonna's presentation was the most pessimistic, and all the more revealing for being heartfelt. She criticized the EU for increasing factionalism, indecisiveness, inefficiency, and a focus on details that invariably harmed Europe's broader strategic interests and alienated it from its citizens. Her remarks made clear the extent to which France is still searching for the path, following the failed referendum on an EU constitution, to its long-cherished goal of a "political Europe" equal to the U.S. in power and influence. The current discouragement suggests that France's hopes to push through institutional reforms by the end of its 2008 presidency could well depend on the vision and energy of France's next president. To her credit, Colonna took it upon herself to ask some of the hard questions. End summary and comment.

Chirac's regrets

[¶](#)2. (SBU) During his August 28 remarks to France's assembled ambassadors on France's key foreign policy objectives (ref A), President Chirac, referring to the EU's failure to mandate the High Representative for CFSP Javier Solana with taking the lead in dealing with Lebanon (as he does on Iran), regretted that Europe had not done more to promote a resolution of the Lebanon crisis. In an apparent indirect reference to the U.S. and reference to Europe's continuing weakness, he called on the EU to "emancipate itself from inhibitions" in order to deal with its "partners" according to the continent's own interests. The only real positive note was his enumeration of the EU's growing ESDP missions in a number of countries: Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Aceh, DRC and soon Kosovo. He concluded with the hope that Europe would affirm itself as an antidote to world instability and globalization.

Douste-Blazy's caution

[¶](#)3. (U) During his own remarks on August 29 (ref B), FM Douste-Blazy vaunted above all France's success in adding the criterion of absorptive capacity to consideration of new EU members (effectively slowing down future enlargements), saying it would be irresponsible to ignore the concerns that enlargement had elicited in France and elsewhere. He called for more "political" control of the process to ensure that enlargement does not proceed on automatic pilot, and

highlighted France's willingness, if necessary, to delay or suspend accession negotiations with a particular candidate country. (Comment: Clearly a reference to Turkey. End comment). On EU institutional reforms, Douste-Blazy said it would be necessary to work within existing treaties for the moment, but he expressed the hope for new "decisions" by the end of the French EU presidency in 2008. Finally, he called for concrete projects which would bring Europe closer to its citizens, but which he also defined as more CFSP and ESDP as well as an increased European ability to respond to humanitarian crises and natural catastrophes. He concluded his remarks with a call for "recreating European momentum based on renewed confidence, without which the European political project would never see the light of day."

Catherine Colonna's outright pessimism

¶4. (U) In a subsequent August 29 intervention by Minister-Delegate for European Affairs Catherine Colonna, however, the tone was markedly and more openly dejected, as summed up by her statement that "while there was no crisis, the EU is afflicted with "languor" (mainly owing to its long and complicated decision-making processes) and general fatigue (at a later point she even refers to exhaustion), which had the potential to call into question the entire European integration project. She asked rhetorically whether the EU could continue to move so slowly in a world that was increasingly not inclined to wait for it. She worried that while the EU was confronted with global demands, it was not a global actor.

¶5. (U) Colonna attributed the blame to the EU's functioning more and more as an intergovernmental body producing, more often than not, difficult compromises (if reaching a decision

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is possible at all) based on diverse views rather than an attempt to promote the common interest. She also discerned a quasi-universal distrust of integration and the process of "harmonization" (of legislation and regulations) that historically has been at the heart of the European "construction." Colonna blamed this growing alienation on three causes. First, enlargement had changed the very essence of the European project; what had worked for six or sixteen no longer did for twenty-five or more. Second, she identified globalization as another destabilizing factor for the classic European model, judging that European-wide economies of scale no longer provided the opportunities of the past and lamenting that Europe as a whole was falling behind other parts of the world in the areas of competition, growth, employment, and investment in research and development. A particularly difficult test for Europe, she said, was to find the right balance between a dynamic and "social" economy.

¶6. (U) Third, Colonna cited citizens' greater expectations toward Europe -- which she said were as diverse as they were all-encompassing -- as an additional factor of instability. On the one hand, they tended to look to Europe whenever there was a problem, whether this involved firefighting in Portugal, illegal immigrants in the Canary Islands, avian flu, terrorism, and most recently Lebanon. Each time, citizens wanted to know "what Europe is doing." On the other hand, Europe often was unable to respond, particularly given that its member states remained unwilling to dedicate more than one percent of their overall GNP to the EU budget. The result was that, although Europe was confronted with global demands, it was not a global actor. Although the EU possessed the basic instruments to assume these responsibilities -- including a budget, CFSP and ESDP -- it had neither the habits of, nor the will to, global power.

¶7. (U) Colonna prescribed three remedies for coming years. First, over the short term, it would be necessary improve the functioning of the EU on the basis of existing treaties (pending the approval of a replacement for the draft

constitutional treaty rejected by the French electorate; this is France's current policy). Second, over the mid-term, the EU would require institutional reforms to restore its capacity to take decisions and action, primarily through a rebalancing of power among the Council, the Commission, and the European Parliament. For the Council, there was a need for decision-making based on a "super majority" rather than unanimity in all but a few cases. She also called for limiting the powers of the Commission to make it a more "collegial" body that represents the general interest. The role and visibility of the European Parliament would also need to be increased as the voice of European citizens.

¶18. (U) Third, Colonna called for recalibrating and rendering more equitable the balance of power between the EU's larger and smaller states. Specifically, she referred to the excessive disparity between countries with small and large populations (in the French view, clearly to the detriment of the latter). She also criticized the EU's practice of granting large and small states alike the same representation rights on the Commission. Colonna asked rhetorically whether it was right and reasonable that the states formed from the disintegration of the Former Yugoslavia, for example, should in aggregation end up with more seats on the commission than such key states as France or Germany.

¶19. (U) Finally, Colonna called on the EU to involve itself less with regulating the daily lives of citizens, saying that it was more important for the EU to assume its responsibilities in Lebanon -- or other broader issues such as internal and external security, employment, sustainable development, migration, foreign policy -- than the size of clams being raised in the ocean off the coast of Bordeaux. She stated that, "the Union needs to make choices; it can't do everything, it is not there to do everything and we cannot ask it to do everything." Or summing up, "the EU should do fewer small things, and more big ones."

¶10. (U) Looking to the future, Colonna said it was time for the EU to make a qualitative leap toward more fundamental change. On enlargement, the fundamental question needed to be answered as to what it means to be a European country, since enlargement modified substantially the very essence of the European project, and it was impossible to pretend that EU was pursuing the same goals but had simply grown in number. Member states needed to "push their thinking farther and not fear to debate the shape of the entire European project," since it was necessary to acknowledge that it could not be a process without an end. She added that the "Europe of results" and concrete projects "was itself in need of results." She called for an open debate on France's influence in Europe -- including in the upcoming presidential elections -- saying it was time for France to take pride

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again in constructing Europe.

Comment

¶11. (C) Chirac's complaint about EU inaction on Lebanon strikes us as somewhat disingenuous, to the extent that he personally took the lead in dealing with the Lebanon crisis and had only himself to blame if he did not turn earlier to the EU. It was also France that insisted on national contributions to UNIFIL rather than attempting to create an ESDP mission, even if this would have required use of the Berlin Plus mechanism to obtain NATO support. The fact is that the French reflex remains to identify themselves with the EU so long as it agrees with them or is willing to follow their lead, but to blame things on the EU when they are outvoted. This has also been the case economically, where French discomfort with globalization and attempts to introduce more free-market principles and open competition into the internal market has lead to increased protectionism.

¶12. (C) Colonna's "cri de coeur" nonetheless demonstrates

the extent to which France continues to suffer the aftershocks of the May 29, 2005 referendum defeat on the EU constitutional treaty. The speech illustrates as well France's continuing difficulties in resolving a number of conundrums related to its strategic goal of a "political" EU, independent of the U.S. and its rival in global power and influence. France may worry about the effect of EU enlargement on decision-making, particularly its impact on French influence, but it is paradoxically only through EU enlargement that the EU will rightfully be able to claim a greater role on the world stage. Similarly, we suspect France's enthusiasm for super-majorities will be determined by the degree to which it perceives it is still able to protect its own equities; as new members decrease France's overall influence within the EU, it has already moved to seek alliances with the other larger EU member states (whence an abiding interest more coordination among France, Germany, the UK, Italy, Spain and Poland). In that context, the Franco-German partnership could become as useful for blocking as well as initiating action; and maintaining the tandem, given Germany's increasing self-confidence and greater influence with new member states, could become even more important to France than to Germany. While it remains to be seen what can be accomplished by the end of the French presidency in 2008, the current mood suggests that only a new president with new vision and energy to fulfill France's long-cherished idea of a "political Europe" will be effective in turning around the current pessimistic mood.

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